

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable". For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name CENTRAL VERMONT RAILROAD PIER

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number State Pier Road ☐ not for publication

city or town New London ☐ vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county New London code 011 zip code 06320

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR Date 12/14/04  
Jennifer Aniskovich, Executive Director, CT Commission on Culture and Tourism

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
☒ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the

National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

☐ removed from the National

Register.

☐ other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper [Signature] Date of Action 1/26/05

Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

New London County, CT  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark an "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

TRANSPORTATION  
ENGINEERING

\_\_\_\_\_

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

\_\_\_\_\_

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

### Period of Significance

1876-1946

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

\_\_\_\_\_

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

### Significant Dates

1876

Property is:

\_\_\_\_\_

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

### Cultural Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, structure

\_\_\_\_\_

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

### Architect/Builder

N/A

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

\_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

### Primary location of additional data:

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ Federal agency

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ Local government

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ University

☐ recorded by Historic American Building Survey

Name of repository:

#

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

State Historic Preservation Office,

Record #

59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, CT 06106

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

### Description:

The Central Vermont Railroad Pier (Photographs 1 and 2, Figure 4) is an 1,100-foot-long earth-filled granite masonry structure that was completed in 1876. It lies just west of the Connecticut State Pier on the west bank of the Thames River, which is tidal at this point and forms part of New London Harbor. The general area was formerly one of warehouses and railroad yard tracks but today is mostly open and used for outdoor lumber storage. The pier property includes an onshore portion that is 850 feet wide and varies in depth from about 100 to 300 feet. Formerly, a frame office building from 1937 and a modern cylindrical storage tank stood on the land portion of the property, but these have been demolished. To the north of the property are Amtrak's electrified Northeast Corridor rail line and, beyond that, the high-level Gold Star Bridge carrying Interstate 95.

The pier is 150 feet wide for most of its length; the final 250 feet, however, is 220 feet wide, giving the pier a hammer-head shape. Currently the pier's surface is covered with asphalt (Photograph 3), with the paving flush with the tops of the masonry perimeter walls. Along the length of the pier's west wall and the head wall of the west slip is a shelf that appears to have accommodated a timber fender of some sort, held in place by iron rods pinned into the masonry, only a few of which survive (Photographs 4 and 5). The walls themselves consist of a coursed ashlar of roughly shaped gray granite blocks typically about 18 inches thick and 4 feet in length, finished with flat capstones joined with iron staples. The walls rise about four feet above the high water mark, but because the tides in New London rise and fall an average of 2 ½ feet, the exposure of the walls constantly varies. The portion below the high water mark is dark colored and partly covered with algae (Photograph 6). The east side of the pier is similar, but because of greater deterioration the masonry is less well defined (Photograph 7). Wooden pilings form a protective barrier along part of the east side. Although the substructure is not visible, it can be assumed from contemporary construction practice that the stone perimeter walls become thicker toward the bottom, continue well below the level of the harbor bed (which was 22 feet below high water at one point), and rest on a dense grid of timber piles. There appears to be some minor subsidence of portions of the west wall.

Objects on the pier are currently limited to three types of mooring appliances, all of which are set within concrete footings (Photographs 8 and 9). In the period of significance, several parallel railroad tracks extended the length of the pier, of which only a remnant at the extreme northeast corner of the property remains visible (Photograph 10). The arrangement of buildings and structures atop the pier changed with the various purposes it has served. When it was built, it had coal-loading equipment and storage bunkers to service a fleet of Reading Railroad coastal freighters that off-loaded coal for New England markets. In 1904 the Central Vermont Railroad decided to use the pier for another purpose, transporting freight and express between New York City and the communities along its inland New England route. To that end, a large freight shed was built along the east side of the pier, with the coal hoist remaining on the west side for some time. Over the years additional buildings

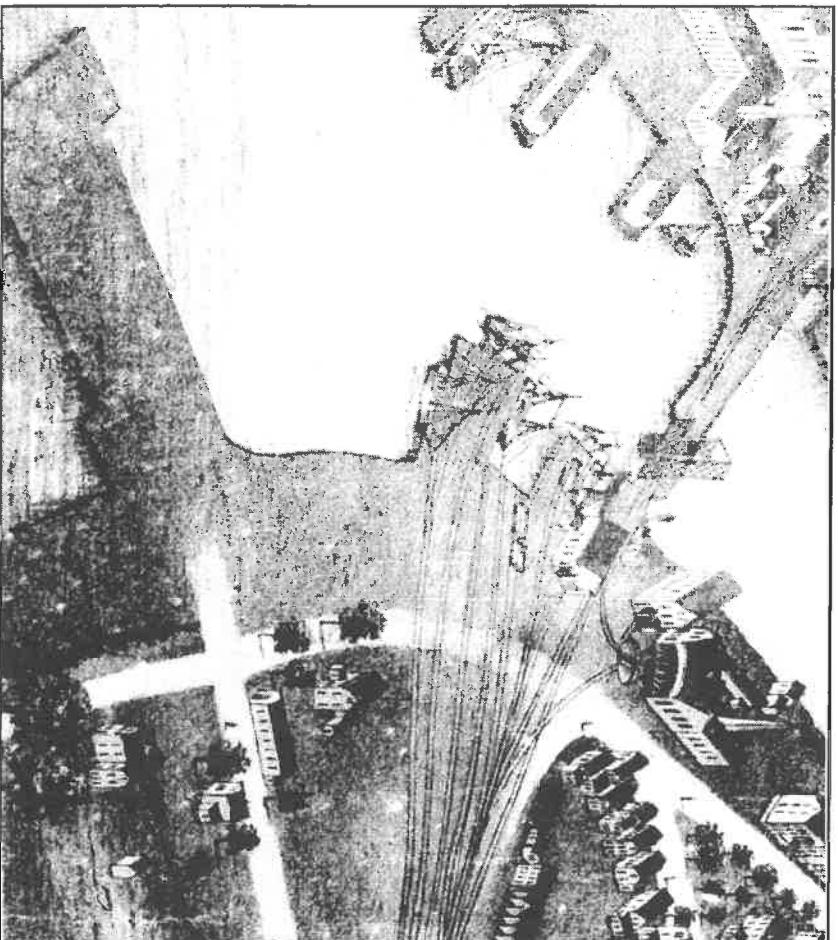
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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

Figure 1: Engraving of the pier (lower left) shortly after completion in 1876, before any buildings, tracks, or structures were added (*New London, Connecticut, 1876*). The railroad's earlier wharves are visible in the upper center of the view, as is the rail line and drawbridge leading to New London's commercial center.



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

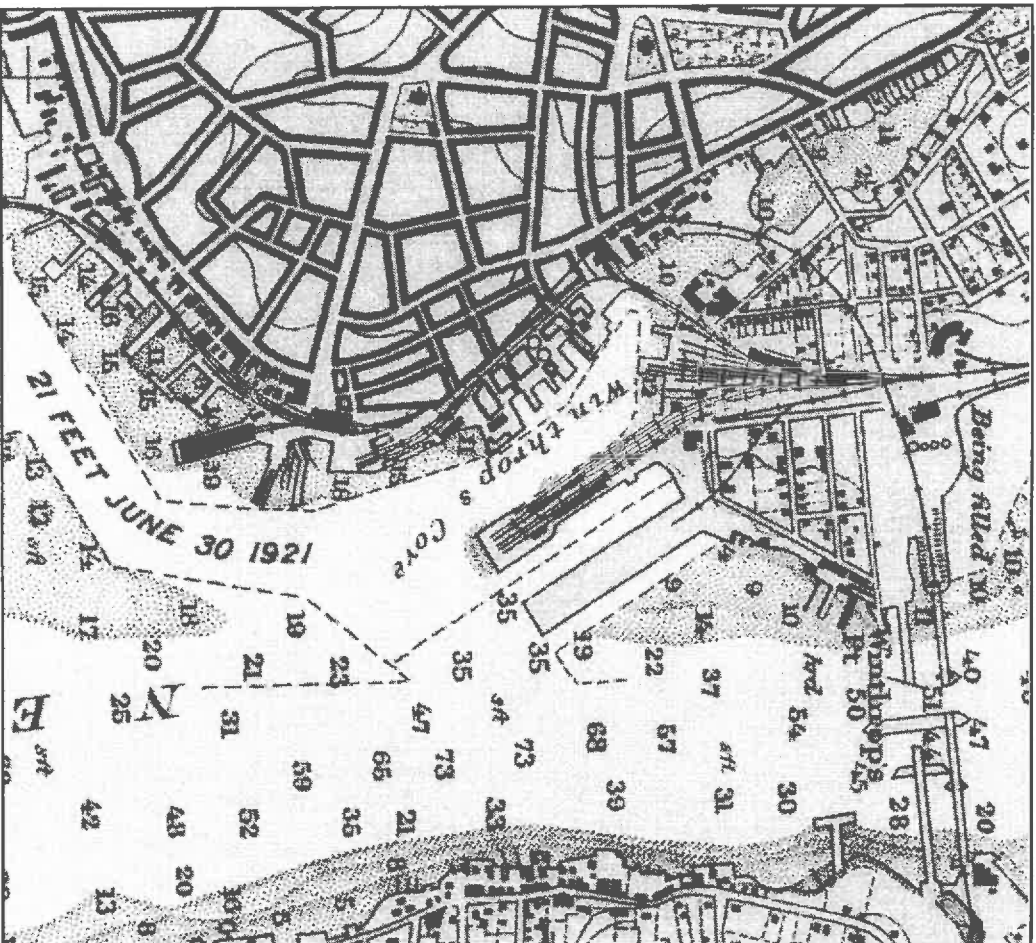


Figure 3: U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey chart of New London Harbor, 1929.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

### Statement of Significance:

#### Summary

The Central Vermont Railroad Pier in New London, Connecticut, is a significant resource because it illustrates the important role that rail-water interchange played in the state's 19<sup>th</sup>-century transportation history (National Register Criterion A). At one time, virtually every Connecticut railroad had some connection with coastal freight and passenger navigation. Before an all-rail route was completed between Boston and New York, passengers could choose to complete their journey via steamship from Fall River, Providence, Stonington, Groton, New London, or Old Saybrook. Coal for Connecticut's industries was brought in by water and transferred to railroad cars well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even the inland routes interchanged freight and passengers with steamship service on the Thames and Connecticut rivers. This large pier was built by the Central Vermont Railroad as a means of bringing in first coal and then general freight and express shipments and was active from 1876 to 1946. The Central Vermont Railroad ran from New London through eastern Connecticut to Palmer, Massachusetts, a major railroad junction, and then continued onward to Vermont and Canada.

The pier also has significance in engineering history as a large and relatively intact example of 19<sup>th</sup>-century harbor-facilities engineering (Criterion C). The form and method of construction reveal much about the period: the pier's large size significantly exceeded the length of facilities built for coastal sailing vessels and clearly was intended to address the needs of larger steam-powered freighters. The method of construction—earth-filled masonry perimeter walls—was also a product of the age of steam; although there exists little in the documentary record describing the process of this pier's construction, it is apparent that without steam-powered pile drivers, pumps, and earth-moving equipment, a pier on this scale would have been beyond the means of a small railroad company. Although no formal survey has been made of this type of resource, it can be said with confidence that this is the only large 19<sup>th</sup>-century pier remaining in Connecticut. Other comparable examples, such as Belle Dock and the New Haven Railroad piers in New Haven, are known to have been destroyed or embedded in later harbor improvements.

Although not primarily being nominated for its information potential (Criterion D), the pier as an artifact could prove illuminating about some aspects of 19<sup>th</sup>-century civil-engineering practice. For example, it would be interesting to know how the depth and density of pilings compare with modern standards, which might become apparent if repairs are made to the east wall, and one could determine through laboratory testing the source of the granite.

The fact that none of the historic buildings and structures that once stood on the pier remain does not constitute a serious issue of integrity. The pier itself is the core of the resource and, when placed in operation, accounted for nearly 80% of the cost of construction. The various appurtenances changed over time as the pier's use changed, but the masonry and fill itself remained constant.

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

Company. Freight headed to New York City or for export through New York harbor was carried by rail to New London, where it was loaded onto one of the company's freighters for an overnight trip to New York's Pier 29. The freighter would then pick up a return cargo bound for New England or Canada. Some cargos, such as fruit, coffee beans, sisal, hides, hemp sugar, tapioca, and crude rubber bypassed the pier and instead were transferred via lighters to and from ocean-going ships waiting in New York Harbor. The railroad's southern division became popularly known as the "Banana Belt."

One of the more interesting aspects of the Central Vermont's New London pier operation was the express service that was offered between New York and the larger towns in the railroad's service area. Special baggage cars marked "New York Fast Freight - Over Night Service" ran in the railroad's passenger trains and sometimes outnumbered coaches. Small shipments could be brought to certain stations along the route, where they would be loaded into the baggage cars, carried to New London, transferred to a freighter, and brought overnight to New York. The route also worked in reverse, allowing rapid delivery from the metropolis to eastern Connecticut, central Massachusetts, and Vermont.

After World War II, a brief economic slump, competition from truck traffic, and the aging of the railroad's freighter fleet combined to make operation of the pier uneconomical. Service was suspended in November 1946 during a strike of New London's dock workers and never resumed. The vessels were tied up at the pier until they were sold for scrap in 1948. Thereafter, the railroad used the pier only for railroad-car storage tracks and as an administrative center for its southern operations. The railroad retained the pier after the line itself was sold to the Connecticut Central Railroad. It was sold to the State of Connecticut in 2001; long-term planning for the facility is still under way.

### Engineering Significance

Pier engineering is straightforward in principle but demanding in the details. Massive masonry retaining walls, the height and width of which we today see only a small portion, define the shape of the pier and contain the earth fill that provides the pier's surface. The walls had to be designed so as to resist the outward pressure of the fill, the erosive action of the sea, and damage from the inevitable collisions. Also critical were the piles driven into the harbor bed and cut off to form a level surface on which to place the masonry. The piles had to be of sufficient depth to reach densely compacted sediment or rock, and they had to be spaced properly so as to bear the load of the walls. On either side of the pier, slips had to be dredged to a consistent depth as close to the walls as was practical.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Central Vermont Railroad Pier  
New London, New London County, CT

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## **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1 **Central Vermont Railroad Pier**  
**New London, New London County, CT**

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### **Verbal Boundary Description:**

The nominated property is recorded in the New London Assessor records as Map G10, Block 245, Lot 3. It is described in a deed to the State of Connecticut dated May 15, 2001 and recorded in the New London Land Records, Volume 1201, page 267.

### **Boundary Justification:**

The nominated property includes the entire pier structure and the immediately adjacent portion of the shore that was railroad property.

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Section number Photographs Page 1 **Central Vermont Railroad Pier**  
**New London, New London County, CT**

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**All Photographs:**

1. Central Vermont Railroad Pier
2. New London, New London County, CT
3. AHS, Inc. Photo
4. October 2003
5. Negative filed with AHS, Inc.

**Captions:**

- 1: Overview of pier from land, showing west side, camera facing southeast.
- 2: Overview of pier from the water, camera facing northeast.
- 3: View of paved surface of pier, camera facing southeast.
- 4: Detail of masonry, west side, showing shelf along the wall that probably accommodated a timber fender structure; camera facing southeast.
- 5: Detail of masonry, head of west slip, showing iron rods that probably supported a timber component; camera facing east.
- 6: Close-up of masonry from the water, west side, camera facing northeast.
- 7: Detail of deteriorated masonry on east side of pier, camera facing northwest.
- 8: Detail of typical mooring cleat, west side of pier, camera facing east.
- 9: Detail of one type of bollard, east side of pier, camera facing east.
- 10: Remnant of railroad tracks visible at the northeast corner of the property, camera facing north.